

High-Resolution Study of ^{237}Np Fission Cross Section from 5 eV to 1 MeV

W. Furman¹⁸, P. Cennini⁴, V. Ketlerov¹⁹, A. Goverdovski¹⁹, V. Konovalov¹⁸, U. Abbondanno¹⁴, G. Aerts⁷, H. Álvarez²⁴, F. Alvarez-Velarde²⁰, S. Andriamonje⁷, J. Andrzejewski³³, P. Assimakopoulos⁹, L. Audouin⁵, G. Badurek¹, P. Baumann⁶, F. Bečvář³¹, J. Benlliure²⁴, E. Berthoumieux⁷, F. Calviño²⁵, D. Cano-Ott²⁰, R. Capote²³, A. Carrillo de Albornoz³⁰, V. Chepel¹⁷, E. Chiaveri⁴, N. Colonna¹³, G. Cortes²⁵, D. Cortina²⁴, A. Couture²⁹, J. Cox²⁹, S. David⁵, R. Dolfini¹⁵, C. Domingo-Pardo²¹, A. Dorochenko¹⁹, W. Dridi⁷, I. Duran²⁴, M. Embid-Segura²⁰, L. Ferrant⁵, A. Ferrari⁴, R. Ferreira-Marques¹⁷, L. Fitzpatrick⁴, H. Fraiss-Koelbl³, K. Fujii¹³, C. Guerrero²⁰, I. Gonçalves³⁰, R. Gallino³⁶, E. Gonzalez-Romero²⁰, F. Gramegna¹², E. Griesmayer³, F. Gunsing⁷, B. Haas³², R. Haight²⁷, M. Heil⁸, A. Herrera-Martinez⁴, M. Igashira³⁷, S. Isaev⁵, E. Jericha¹, Y. Kadi⁴, F. Käppeler⁸, D. Karamanis⁹, D. Karadimos⁹, M. Kerveno⁶, P. Koehler²⁸, D. Kolokolov¹⁹, E. Kossionides³⁹, M. Krtička³¹, C. Lamboudis¹⁰, H. Leeb¹, A. Lindote¹⁷, I. Lopes¹⁷, M. Lozano²³, S. Lukic⁶, J. Marganec³³, L. Marques³⁰, S. Marrone¹³, P. Mastinu¹², A. Mengoni⁴, P. M. Milazzo¹⁴, C. Moreau¹⁴, M. Mosconi⁸, F. Neves¹⁷, H. Oberhummer¹, S. O'Brien²⁹, M. Oshima³⁸, J. Pancin⁷, C. Papachristodoulou⁹, C. Papadopoulos⁴⁰, C. Paradela²⁴, N. Patronis⁹, A. Pavlik², P. Pavlopoulos³⁴, L. Perrot⁷, R. Plag⁸, A. Plompen¹⁶, A. Plukis⁷, A. Poch²⁵, C. Pretel²⁵, J. Quesada²³, T. Rauscher²⁶, R. Reifarh²⁷, M. Rosetti¹¹, C. Rubbia¹⁵, G. Rudolf⁶, P. Rullhusen¹⁶, J. Salgado³⁰, L. Sarchiapone⁴, M. Sedysheva¹⁸, C. Stephan⁵, G. Tagliente¹³, J. L. Tain²¹, L. Tassan-Got⁵, L. Tavora³⁰, R. Terlizzi¹³, G. Vannini³⁵, P. Vaz³⁰, A. Ventura¹¹, D. Villamarin²⁰, M. C. Vincente²⁰, V. Vlachoudis⁴, R. Vlastou⁴⁰, F. Voss⁸, H. Wendler⁴, M. Wiescher²⁹, K. Wisshak⁸

The n_TOF Collaboration

¹Atominstut der Österreichischen Universitäten, Technische Universität Wien, Austria, ²Institut für Isotopenforschung und Kernphysik, Universität Wien, Austria, ³Fachhochschule Wiener Neustadt, Wiener Neustadt, Austria, ⁴CERN, Geneva, Switzerland, ⁵Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique/IN2P3 - IPN, Orsay, France, ⁶Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique/IN2P3 - IReS, Strasbourg, France, ⁷CEA/Saclay - DSM, Gif-sur-Yvette, France, ⁸Forschungszentrum Karlsruhe GmbH (FZK), Institut für Kernphysik, Germany, ⁹University of Ioannina, Greece, ¹⁰Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, ¹¹ENEA, Bologna, Italy, ¹²Laboratori Nazionali di Legnaro, Italy, ¹³Istituto Nazionale di Fisica Nucleare, Bari, Italy, ¹⁴Istituto Nazionale di Fisica Nucleare, Trieste, Italy, ¹⁵Università degli Studi Pavia, Pavia, Italy, ¹⁶CEC-JRC-IRMM, Geel, Belgium, ¹⁷LIP - Coimbra & Departamento de Física da Universidade de Coimbra, Portugal, ¹⁸Joint Institute for Nuclear Research, Frank Laboratory of Neutron Physics, Dubna, Russia, ¹⁹Institute of Physics and Power Engineering, Kaluga region, Obninsk, Russia, ²⁰Centro de Investigaciones Energeticas Medioambientales y Tecnológicas, Madrid, Spain, ²¹Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas - University of Valencia, Spain, ²²Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Spain, ²³Universidad de Sevilla, Spain, ²⁴Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, Spain, ²⁵Universitat Politécnica de Catalunya, Barcelona, Spain, ²⁶Department of Physics and Astronomy - University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland, ²⁷Los Alamos National Laboratory, New Mexico, USA, ²⁸Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Physics Division, Oak Ridge, USA, ²⁹University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, USA, ³⁰Instituto Tecnológico e Nuclear, Lisbon, Portugal, ³¹Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic, ³²Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique/IN2P3 - CENBG, Bordeaux, France, ³³University of Lodz, Lodz, Poland, ³⁴Pôle Universitaire Léonard de Vinci, Paris La Défense, France, ³⁵Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Bologna, and Sezione INFN di Bologna, Italy, ³⁶Dipartimento di Fisica Generale, Università di Torino and Sezione INFN di Torino, I-10125 Torino, Italy, ³⁷Tokyo Institute of Technology, Tokyo, Japan, ³⁸Japan Atomic Energy Research Institute, Tokai-mura, Japan, ³⁹NCSR, Athens, Greece, ⁴⁰National Technical University of Athens, Greece

Abstract. A series of measurements of ^{237}Np fission cross section have been performed at the CERN spallation neutron facility n_TOF which covers a wide energy range from 1 eV up to 250 MeV. A fast ionization chamber (FIC) was used as a fission fragment detector with registration efficiency of not less than 97 %. Particular attention was paid to correct the fission

cross section with use of ^{235}U standard. Total experimental uncertainties are determined to be at the level of 3%. Analysis of the experimental data in the restricted neutron energy from 5 eV up to 1 MeV showed a systematic deviation from evaluated data (ENDF/B-VI). This discrepancy amounts to up to a factor 3 for resolved resonances in the neutron energy range of 5 eV - 2 KeV, and is in good agreement with some previous experiments. A similar disagreement at the level of 6-7% was found for higher energies around the threshold ($E_n = 300$ keV-1 MeV). This energy range is essential for the transmutation of neptunium in ADS or fast reactors. It is concluded that an updated evaluation of nuclear data for ^{237}Np is required.

INTRODUCTION

Neptunium-237 is the most important actinide in the problem of spent fuel transmutation. While the development of power facilities of a new generation like fast reactors or accelerator driven systems (ADS) need accurate nuclear data, large discrepancies in the fission cross section data available up to now in the resolved resonances region have been detected. This situation motivated experimental activities devoted to repeat fission cross section measurements in a wide neutron energy range, aiming at obtaining high accuracy cross section data. This experimental programme has been setup at the CERN neutron time-of-flight facility n_TOF[1]. This is a spallation neutron source where neutrons are generated by the interaction of the 20 GeV proton beam from the CERN PS accelerator with a massive water-cooled lead target. The spallation neutrons have an energy spectrum that covers the range 1 eV to at least 250 MeV with intensity sufficient for the irradiation of thin neptunium samples installed in an ionization chamber. The time of flight (TOF) technique gives high-energy resolution (up to 10^{-4}) with a width of the proton bunch of less than 7 ns and a flight path of 186m. These experimental conditions allowed us to perform detailed studies in the resolved resonance region and simultaneously in the fast region. The results of the analysis reported here cover the neutron energy range from 20 eV to approximately 700 KeV, chosen to point out the most important discrepancies between experimental and evaluated nuclear data for this isotope.

EXPERIMENTAL DETAILS

The ^{237}Np and ^{235}U targets were installed back-to-back in a multiple ionization chamber. All targets were fabricated from high purity material using the painting technique and analyzed with alpha-counting with semiconductor detector in good geometry. The total masses were 12.82 ± 0.08 mg for neptunium and 31.8 ± 0.2 mg for uranium.

A fast parallel plate ionization chamber (FIC0) was used as a fragment detector. The detector chamber is a cylindrical stainless steel assembly 30 cm long and 40 cm in diameter with 2 mm Al windows. The operating gas was a mixture 90%Ar + 10% CF₄ at a

pressure of 600 mbar. The distance between electrodes was chosen to be 5 mm to get fast signals with 300 V high voltage supply. Our past experience in the use of analogous chambers showed a time resolution of 2-3 ns with minimal overlapping of fission fragments and α -particles well suited for the n_TOF facility. This is sufficient for n_TOF timing and neutron flux. The registration efficiency of the detector was near 98%.

The ionization detector was equipped with fast electronics including time-digital converters (TDC) and wave-form digitizers (WFD, or FADC). TDC are used for long times covering the neutron energy range from 0.1 eV to 1 MeV. FADC have been used for measurements above 20 KeV.

The energy calibration was performed using the resolved resonances of $^{235}\text{U}(n,f)$ and an example for a limited energy range is presented in Fig. 1. The results show very good agreement with known experimental data. This allowed us to normalize the experimental fission yield for $^{237}\text{Np}(n,f)$ reaction into absolute fission cross section as a function of neutron energy.

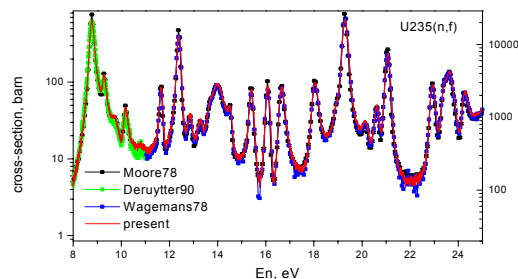


FIGURE 1. Comparison of ^{235}U fission cross section with the existing experimental data (from EXFOR).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the fission cross-section measurements around well-known resonance cluster at the neutron energy $E_n = 39.9$ eV are presented in Fig. 2 together with other available data [2,3,4]. Disagreement between different data sets looks too large to satisfy practical needs. The list of calculated fission cross section integrals $A_\lambda = \int \sigma_f dE_n$ for neutron energies between 38 and 42 eV is presented in Table 1. A factor of 3 higher value is found in a comparison of the present data and the data of Plattard *et al.* [3].

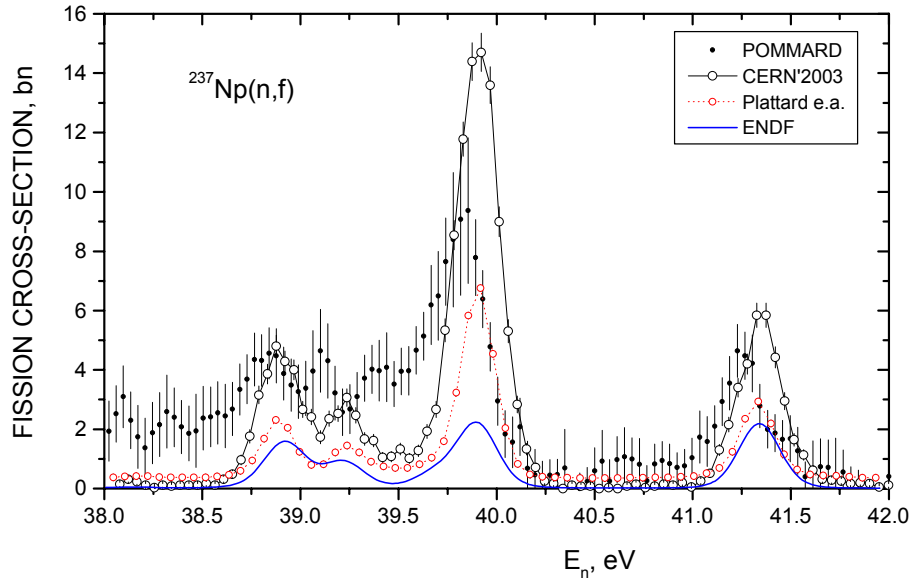


FIGURE 2. $^{237}\text{Np}(n,f)$ cross-section between 38 and 42 eV.

TABLE 1. A comparison of fission cross-section integrals from different experiments. The ENDF/B-VI value is lower than the value of Plattard *et al.* (see Fig. 2).

Author	$A_{\text{int}}, \text{b}\cdot\text{eV}$	Comment
n_TOF 2003	8.34 ± 0.10	Spallation source
Brown <i>et al.</i> [2]	10.2 ± 2.5	POMMARD
Plattard <i>et al.</i> [3]	2.88 ± 0.03	Linac, Saclay
Dermenjiev <i>et al.</i> [4]	9.14 ± 1.37	IBR-30, Dubna

The extremely good n_TOF energy resolution allowed us to get more accurate and detailed data above 600 eV. This is shown in Fig. 3 where the present data are compared with the data of Plattard *et al.* [3]. Resonance doublets around $E_n = 1150, 1270, 1320$ eV are clearly resolved. The determination of more accurate resonance parameters is possible. This work is in progress with SAMMY code.

The experimental data for fast neutrons are shown in Fig. 4. The ratio of the fission cross sections of

^{237}Np to that of ^{235}U is used as experimental observable. Agreement between the different data sets is good excluding the region above 450 KeV. To clarify the situation fission cross-sections measured with only TOF technique are presented in Fig. 5. Obviously, all TOF experiments show higher fission cross sections than contained in present in evaluated data libraries. The discrepancy is of the order of 6-7%.

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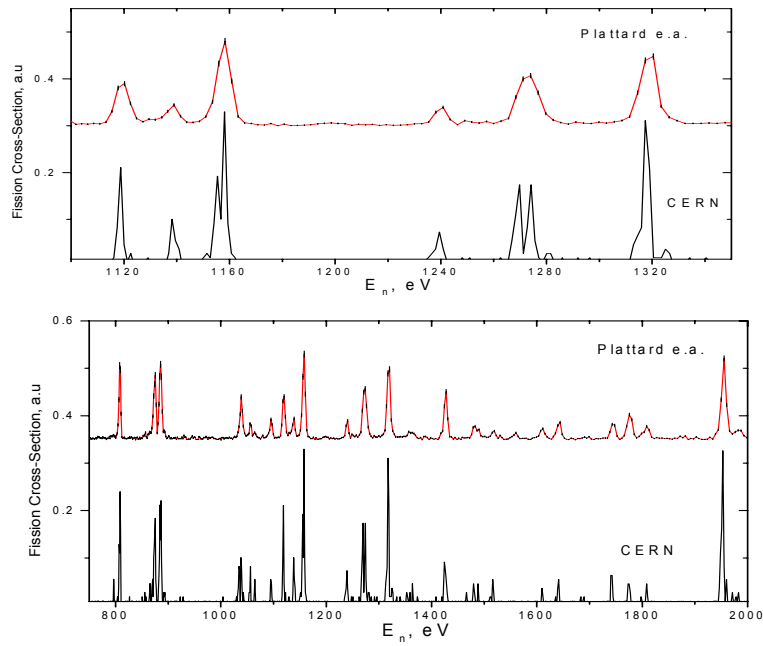


FIGURE 3. Resolution effects in ^{237}Np fission cross section (upper part) and general view between 700 and 2000 eV.

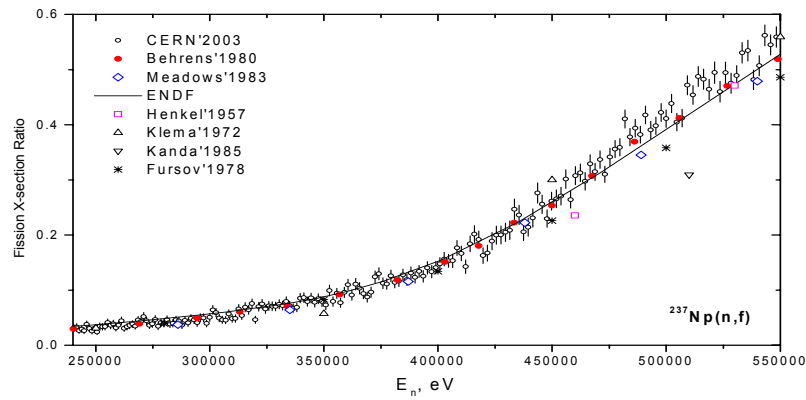


FIGURE 4. Fission cross-section of $^{237}\text{Np}(n,f)$ relative Uranium-235.

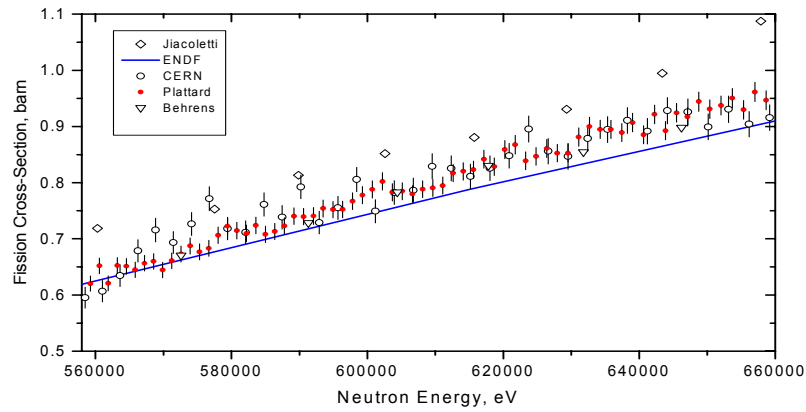


FIGURE 5. Fission cross-section of $^{237}\text{Np}(n,f)$ relative ^{235}U in the energy range up to 660 KeV. Only experimental data from TOF measurements are shown for comparison.